

THE GOLDEN AGE

Edited by LOGAN DOUGLASS HOWELL

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A BOY'S RECOLLECTIONS OF LINCOLN

By H. J. THOMAS

THE first time I ever saw Mr. Lincoln was fifty-five years ago. At that period, in many western towns at least, the arrival of the stage coach, bringing mail, express parcels and passengers, was the great event of the day. It was the custom to set down the travellers at their own homes, and to this custom I, a boy of nine, was indebted for this first sight of him.

The coach, bringing my father from a sitting of court at a neighboring town, had stopped at our door, and as he alighted, the children, myself the eldest, rushed out to greet him, whereupon a startling head appeared at the coach window, and its owner exclaimed in a high-pitched voice:

"That's all right, Dick. There are a lot of little rascals at home who'll be glad to see me!"

"Who was that homely man?" I asked my father as the stage drove away.

"He is not homely," was the reply, "at least not always. When addressing a jury he is the handsomest man I ever saw. That, my son, is Abraham Lincoln, the greatest lawyer in the West."

Shortly afterward, referring to this remark, my father said to me that Mr. Lincoln was not only a great lawyer, but, what was infinitely more important, a good man. Having known him since 1836, served with him in the legislature, practiced law at the same bar and corresponded with him for years, he knew whereof he spoke.

It chanced that one of my earliest duties as a boy, was to assort and file my father's papers, and it will be easy to understand what interest I took, following the incident just related, in reading Mr. Lincoln's letters. One of them, here reproduced, was in response to an invita-

tion to join in a political debate during the exciting presidential campaign of 1844. In another I recall this apology for delay in writing: "When your last letter came I put it in my hat" (a not unusual custom in those days), "and buying a new one the next day, the old one was set aside and the letter lost sight of for a time."

My father had often put before me, both verbally and in his letters to me when away at boarding school, the character of Washington as a pattern, and now, noting my evident admiration of Mr. Lincoln, he lost no opportunity of holding him up to me in like manner. Thus my enthusiasm was so aroused that, though a mere boy, I followed with absorbing interest, and read as it appeared, every line of the great debate of 1858—the debate that returned Douglas to the Senate and made Lincoln President.

So it came about that shortly after his nomination in 1860, being not only his ardent admirer, but an equally ardent politician—of fifteen years—I expressed a wish to go to Springfield, thirty miles away, for the sole purpose of seeing Mr. Lincoln again. To this my father readily assented. His instructions for the great expedition were few and simple: "Go to the State House and send in your name and residence. He will do the rest."

I arrived at an interesting moment, as the Committee appointed by the National Convention, was there to notify Mr. Lincoln officially of his nomination. When I was announced he turned, and seeing a lad standing hesitating in the doorway, immediately left the group of notables, and came forward to greet me. As I repeated my name his face lighted up.

"So this is Dick's boy," he exclaimed, at the

same time putting his hand on my head, in a way that left me feeling almost as important as the Senators.

I was wearing on my watch chain, at the time, a small gold-mounted axe, a maul, and a wedge, all made of black walnut from a genuine Lincoln rail, as duly attested by his sometime backwoods companion, John Hanks. These

hand behind his ear and leaning forward expectantly.

"Dr. Small," announced the newcomer.

"Dr. Small," repeated Mr. Lincoln. "Very strange!" he continued. "The tallest man I ever knew was named 'Short', and the shortest man I ever knew was named 'Long'—and there's a fellow down in Virginia whom they

Springfield, Feb. 14th 1844—
Friend Richard:

I am sorry to have to say I can find but one copy of President's Messages in town, and that one, belongs to the State Library, and, of course, can not be had— If alive and well, I am sure to be with you on the 22nd. I will meet the two of mighty adversaries you mention, in the best manner I can— No news here—

Yours forever.
A. Lincoln

Mr. Lincoln took in his hand, making some pleasant remark about them, and about my being clearly a Republican who was not ashamed to show his colors. I mention this merely as evincing Mr. Lincoln's sympathetic nature, his close observation even of little things and his readiness to enter into the feelings of a boy he had never known, even in the midst of the great function the National Committee was there to perform, and of which he was the central figure.

He stood chatting with me for several minutes, until again interrupted by the usher's voice announcing "Dr. Small, of Chicago." Whereupon there appeared upon the scene a very tall and exceptionally stout man.

"What name?" said Mr. Lincoln, putting his

call—"Wise". Come in, Dr. Small."

Mr. Lincoln then returned to the Committee and proceeded to entertain them by exhibiting a number of presents sent him by admiring friends throughout the country. Among these were miniature log cabins, and flatboats, also log chains—one of forty links cut from a single piece of wood, mauls and wedges for splitting rails, and axes galore—notably one made and sent by the Ames Axe Company, of enormous size.

This great axe had a helve to match, and calling special attention to it, Mr. Lincoln took the helve by the extreme end, raised it slowly to a horizontal position and held it steadily at arm's length. Then lowering it gently to the floor, he challenged anyone present to match

the feat, remarking, when there was no response, "I guess I'm the only rail-splitter in the crowd."

It was indeed a notable performance, and confirmed all that had been said of Mr. Lincoln's wonderful strength.

After the personal experience related above, I can readily believe the story of Stephen Brice's meeting with Lincoln in a small country hotel in Northern Illinois in 1858, for this story portrays again the great, kind-hearted, simple man, leaving important public characters and close political friends and advisers, to stroll with and entertain an unknown boy, simply because he was a boy among strangers, and this on the eve of his impending combat with Douglas at Freeport, the crowning one of the Great Debate.

Neither could I, nor could anyone who heard his greeting of Dr. Small, ever afterward question for an instant the quietness or the quality

of Mr. Lincoln's wit, or have reason to doubt the genuineness of every good story and apt rejoinder laid at his door.

Abraham Lincoln was preeminently the Great American, endowed with prophetic vision and an intellect equal to every call made upon it. Unspoiled by place or power, he had the simplicity of a child, yet his public utterances were profound and his State papers are classics. With the saddest face in repose that I have ever seen, he had the keenest sense of humor and the readiest wit. With the largest heart and the deepest sympathy for every human being, yet always "firm in the purpose of a good intent," he was unswervingly loyal to his conscience and his duty.

If every youth in the land were to make a study of Lincoln's life and character, and as far as possible emulate his example, the future of the Nation would be secure indeed.

THINGS I HATE

By ISABEL GORDON CURTIS



The very nicest time of all
Is when the shadows climb the wall;
For then the fire grows red and bright,
The lamp throws out a cheerful light,
And neighbors they come dropping in—
It's when the good times just begin
For big folks—but instead for me—
I wish I lived across the sea
In China—there it's growing light
And here instead, I'm saying "Good-night."
I hate this candle—and I hate
The loud, old clock that's striking eight,
I hate the braiding of my hair—
I hate the long, dark, shadowy stair—
I hate the black night overhead—
But, oh, I hate most—going to bed.